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11 December 2017

Mr Russell Lunn
Headteacher
Sywell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
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Dear Mr Lunn

Short inspection of Sywell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You were a teacher in this school at the time of the last inspection. You are now a very well respected headteacher. Thirteen parents chose to write down how much they appreciate your presence, the culture you have modelled and your caring leadership. One parent commented: 'The headteacher is a really positive professional and an exceptional role model for his staff and the children alike.'

You describe the school as a community with strong core values of hope, trust, tolerance, respect, honesty and compassion. You are proud to use the words of one of the pupils who said that 'we work together in God's hands'. Values are deeply rooted and are evident in the positive behaviour of the pupils and in relationships across the school. The use of display around the school is a powerful feature both to celebrate learning and to stimulate spirituality. The woodland walk, the prayer areas in every classroom and the new 'stained glass window' designs in the school hall are all examples.

Many people have said that the school has a 'good feel'. You believe that this comes about because the whole community comes together to support pupils' learning and development. Staff are proud to work in this school and they appreciate your leadership. Governors are also very committed to the development and the values

of this happy school. They keep school leaders well focused with their warm persistence.

Since the last inspection, leaders and governors have maintained a close eye on the areas identified for improvement. Governors now are challenging and tenacious, and they are deeply involved in the school development plan. Their frequent visits are linked to the areas identified. Their informative reports feed back into school planning. Pupils' attainment and progress are checked and discussed regularly alongside other important indicators of school life, such as attendance, punctuality and well-being. These improvements in the use of assessment information have led to more demanding work for the most able pupils, particularly in mathematics in key stage 2, where the greater challenge led to two of the three pupils exceeding the expected standard in 2017. There has been some improvement in pupils' writing, but improvement plans still retain an emphasis on this skill.

Leaders and governors have a realistic view of the improvements made so far and where more attention is needed. They recognise that each year group is small, meaning that it is more important to identify and meet the needs of each pupil than to calculate percentages. Nevertheless, although attainment is above the national averages, progress is in line with the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have detailed knowledge of pupils in your school and the difficulties some of them face. As the school's designated safeguarding officer, you have ensured that staff are trained and know what to do if they have a concern. Your frequent updates at staff briefings ensure that knowledge is kept up to date and relevant. Recruitment procedures are secure. Policy and practice take account of the most recent legislation. You ensure that safeguarding records are up to date and detailed, and you take decisive and persistent action where necessary to ensure that each individual child is protected. You work effectively with other agencies and parents to keep pupils safe and secure.

Pupils' conduct, care and respect for each other plays a significant part in their feeling of safety when in school. They have been taught to support and value each other and they say they will always be helped by their teacher if they are worried. Outside school they can draw on their learning, for example, about road and e-safety. In summary, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- As this was a short inspection, it focused on questions, known as key lines of enquiry, one of which concerns the effectiveness of safeguarding and is covered above.
- I considered how additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is used to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have ensured that an

individualised approach is taken when deciding who might need additional support. Pupils' progress is tracked throughout the year and is collated and discussed with all teachers in four progress meetings. Each pupil's progress is considered, and interventions planned as appropriate. Every pupil has an individual provision plan but pupils who are disadvantaged or falling behind access more interventions than those pupils whose progress is strong. Additional funding is used alongside school budgets to fund intervention groups, one-to-one teaching and wrap-around care. Governors monitor the use of this money and check regularly that it is well spent and is leading to accelerated progress. The numbers of pupils are small and so additional funding is limited. However, leaders are using additional funding effectively and there is evidence in pupils' books that it is making a difference. Leaders and governors should ensure that timely, statutory information about the planning and impact of this work is published on the school website.

- I considered how leaders and governors are responding to the latest key stage 2 outcomes for the most able pupils. In 2017, high-prior-attaining pupils exceeded expected standards at the end of key stage 2 in mathematics in greater number than in reading and writing. During the inspection, there was convincing evidence seen of strong teaching and learning in mathematics lessons, in pupils' books and folders, and in current pupils' progress information.
- One year ago, reading was identified by school leaders as an area where improvement was needed. A new approach was researched and planned, new resources purchased and staff trained, but there has not been enough time for impact to be visible. Leaders are confident, based on their tracking, that these new strategies will bring improved progress in reading.
- After summer 2017, leaders and governors added writing to the new school development plan with a renewed focus on grammar, punctuation and spelling in key stage 1. Leaders have demonstrated an honest and accurate assessment of their current strengths and weaknesses. However, planning has not yet secured improvement in the teaching and learning of writing. Although specific writing skills and techniques are taught, such as the use of 'powerful verbs', there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing in a variety of genres and contexts. In subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils have few opportunities to practise different styles of writing. In addition, activities and questions are not as well matched to pupils' writing abilities and starting points in these subjects as they are in English and mathematics lessons. As a result, some of the most able pupils do not reach the highest standards in their writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue successful strategies to improve pupils' reading so that more pupils progress to the highest standards by the end of key stage 2

- teaching in English and the wider curriculum enables the most able pupils to write in a range of genres and styles to help them reach the highest standards by the end of key stage 2
- all statutory information is published accurately on the school's website and elsewhere, as appropriate.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Ward
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I considered evidence from a range of sources, including the previous inspection report and information about the school's performance in 2016 and 2017. I also reviewed the school's website and read its published policies. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and considered parents' responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, the Ofsted staff survey, the Ofsted pupil survey, the results of a recent school survey and one letter. Meetings were held with you, governors and one teacher to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection and the progress of disadvantaged pupils. I considered a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation documents and development plans, the pupil premium strategy and provision plans, evidence of leaders' and governors' monitoring and reports, the single central record of the checks on staff and volunteers, a sample of recruitment files, the safeguarding policy and records of actions taken to protect pupils' welfare. I looked at records of staff training to ensure that they were up to date. I talked with a group of staff to make sure they knew what to do if they were concerned about a child. We jointly made visits to lessons, looked at the quality of work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning. I met formally with a group of pupils from key stage 2 to listen to their views. I spoke with the chair of the governing body on the telephone and read reports written by a representative of the local authority and by an external consultant.